

Salinas-area school districts issue more than 200 pink slips

by **Sunita Vijayan** and • the Associated Press •
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More than 200 Salinas-area teachers and other **school** employees received pink-slip notices as of Monday, the legal deadline to send preliminary layoff warnings.

Across the state, nearly 22,000 educators were issued preliminary layoff notices, as state Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell cited the dismal financial climate as a reason for the cuts. During the past two budget cycles, public **education funding** for K-14 has been slashed by nearly \$18 billion, state officials say.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger is proposing \$2.4 billion more in cuts to education this fiscal year.

"These are tough times, and there is only so much to go around," Schwarzenegger said during a brief stop in Salinas on Monday. "We are protecting education."

March 15 is the annual deadline for school districts to send out preliminary layoff notices to teachers and other certificated school employees in the state. The deadline for sending out final layoff notices is May 15.

In Monterey County, the hardest-hit district was Monterey Peninsula Unified, which issued pink slips to 53 teachers in **K-12** schools. Judy Durand, the district's executive director of human resources, said the district also sent out preliminary notices to

52 employees within the adult education program: 22 permanent part-time staff and 30 hourly employees.

In Salinas, more than 70 teachers, administrators and counselors were notified that they may be let go.

Salinas Union High School District notified five counselors with the pink-slip notices, said Alejandro Hogan, the district's assistant superintendent for human resources. The district's board of trustees unanimously voted last week to lay off the counselors, a move that would **save** about \$375,000 of its overall operating budget of \$79.2 million.

The district lost about \$7.8 million in the 2008-09 school year and \$4 million in 2009-10 in state funding. Last year, the district saw the most pink slips, 70, issued for the March 15 deadline in the county.

District officials said last week they hope to find the five counselors other jobs in the district.

The Alisal Union School District said it sent out notices to seven temporary teachers, three administrators and 11 principals. The strife-ridden district, battling discord between trustees, administrators, parents and teachers, is awaiting a takeover by a state trustee.

Meanwhile, Salinas City Elementary School District is set to lose seven non-tenured teachers in the K-6 level, said Pat Willingham, the director of personnel services. Another 17 temporary teaching positions will be eliminated at the expiration of their one-year contracts, Willingham said.

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At Santa Rita Union School District, 19 layoff notices were given to teachers and administrators, said Superintendent Mike Brusa. Additionally, Brusa said, five middle school teachers will be moved to elementary schools as middle school programs are slashed. The programs affected, he said, include exploratory classes such as life skills and culture. The cuts were made during a board meeting in February, Brusa said.

Washington Union School District Superintendent Dee Baker said five classroom teachers, a music teacher and a principal have received preliminary layoff notices.

Greenfield Union School District said it issued notices for a classified employee and a management position.

State ranked near the bottom

California schools rank at or near the bottom nationally in academic performance, student-teacher ratios in middle and high school, access to guidance counselors and the percentage of seniors who go directly to four-year colleges, according to a 2009 report by the Institute for Democracy, Education and Access at the University of California, Los Angeles.

The state's public schools employ nearly 307,000 **K-12 teachers**, according to the state Department of Education. About 7 percent of those teachers have received pink slips.

The layoff figures do not include classified school employees such as bus drivers, maintenance workers and cafeteria staff. School districts have 45 days to issue pink slips to those workers, and as many as 10,000 could be facing unemployment, O'Connell said.

Not all the threatened layoffs will be carried out. The final tally depends on the state budget to be adopted for the coming fiscal year.

Earlier this month, the U.S. Department of Education rejected California's application for the first round of its "Race to the Top" competition, which will distribute \$4.3 billion to states for education reform.

With the final notice deadline of May 15, many district officials are seeking ways to prevent actual layoffs.

In Spreckels, for instance, district Superintendent Harold Khan said Spreckels Union issued just one layoff notice — to Nadene Dermody, the district's music instructor for the past 10 years. Because the position is partially paid for through the district's education foundation, Khan said, there is a chance it will be saved. The board of trustees is expected to meet with the foundation staff in April to find out whether they can generate enough funds to pay for the position.

At least one school district in the county, King City Union, was spared from having to send out any notices.

Rory Livingston, the district's assistant superintendent of business, said officials have been operating on a tight budget for the past two years. Last year, the district issued the second-highest number of layoff notices in the county, 43.

The district was released from supervision by the county Office of Education in October, after budget forecasting showed the 3 percent reserves would hold through the next two school years.

Livingston said the district has seen a reduction of \$7 million in expenses and \$4 million in revenue over the past three years.

"We had the pain last year," he said.

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- Salinas Californian staff writer Leslie Griffy contributed to this article.

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